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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000155

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: USCENTCOM COMMANDER ADMIRAL
FALLON'S JANUARY 25 VISIT TO ASHGABAT - MILITARY ISSUES

Classified By: CHARGE RICHARD E. HOAGLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 (B), (D)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: USCENTCOM Commander Admiral William J. Fallon, discussed with Defense Minister General Agageldi Mammetgeldiyev and State Border Service Chief General-Major Bayram Alovov Turkmenistan's security situation, ongoing military reforms, and regional issues during separate meetings on January 25. Alovov provided additional detail on two border incidents that President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov had raised in his earlier meeting with Admiral Fallon (reftel). The president also gave permission for the defense minister to attend a CENTCOM Commander-hosted conference in February in Tampa. END SUMMARY.

DEFENSE MINISTER IMPRESSED BY VISIT TO USS HARRY S TRUMAN

12. (SBU) Defense Minister Agageldi Mammetgeldiyev welcomed Commander, U.S. Central Command, Admiral William J. Fallon, to Turkmenistan and thanked him for a superb trip to Bahrain to NAVCENT Headquarters that included a visit to the aircraft carrier USS Harry S Truman. Mammetgeldiyev described his experience of landing and taking off of the carrier as fantastic. He was impressed by the professionalism of the sailors and bravery of the aviators.

13. (SBU) Admiral Fallon informed General Mammetgeldiyev that President Berdimuhamedov had approved the defense minister's attendance at the Central Asian States' Chief of Defense (CHOD) conference in Tampa in February. During the earlier meeting, Admiral Fallon had explained to the president that the consultative conference would allow for a good exchange of views and provide opportunities to improve regional security through closer cooperation. Berdimuhamedov agreed, then sighed and added, "We have bureaucracy here, too. Please send me a diplomatic note about it."

14. (SBU) Mammetgeldiyev said his focus was on improving the capabilities of the military to defend the country. He

expressed interest in getting price and construction timeline details for a "rocket-equipped cutter," roughly a 500T-600T vessel equipped with ship-to-ship or ship-to-shore missiles. He thought the level and type of U.S. education and training programs were very good. He was not interested in developing an NCO corps, saying "conscription allows the youth to serve the country, learn skills, and express their patriotism." They had no trouble getting young people to compete for seats in the Military Institute or to stay past their two-year conscription period.

BORDER SERVICE CHIEF FOCUSED ON IMPROVING BORDER PROTECTION CAPABILITIES AND STOPPING DRUGS

15. (SBU) With the trip to Bahrain still fresh in his mind, State Border Service (SBS) Chief Alovov started the meeting by describing his visit to "U.S. territory" - the visit to the carrier - as simply unforgettable. He said the NAVCENT HQ visit gave him a good opportunity to see U.S. vessels. The SBS's priority areas of development are to get more practical training opportunities and to increase the number of more qualified, contract personnel needed to operate the new equipment the SBS is purchasing. Alovov said he had already placed newly purchased equipment in the Turkmenistan-Iran-Afghanistan tri-border area and had effectively shut down the drug flow. He thanked Admiral Fallon for U.S. support for the SBS's efforts to secure Turkmenistan's borders and specifically sought U.S. assistance on the Caspian maritime border.

AFGHANISTAN BORDER-RELATED INCIDENTS

ASHGABAT 00000155 002 OF 002

16. (C) During Admiral Fallon's meeting with President Berdimuhamedov, at the start of their discussion on Afghanistan Berdimuhamedov noted two incidents involving Turkmenistan had occurred in 2007. The first involved Taliban fighters who had attacked Afghan police near the border. The police fled into Turkmenistan in the Tagtabazaar area. Turkmenistan's SBS soldiers responded and provided security, aid, fuel, and food to the police. The Taliban were close enough to shout demands that they wanted \$10,000. Berdimuhamedov said he gave instructions for the SBS not to talk to them and to deal only with official Afghanistan government representatives. Alovov provided no further details on this incident during his meeting.

17. (C) Berdimuhamedov called to Admiral Fallon's attention - but not as a complaint, he emphasized - an incident from 2007 in which Turkmenistan had confirmed air incursions from Afghanistan into its airspace. He said President Karzai had apologized, but he'd received contradictory responses from ISAF and from the U.S. side. He noted again he was not complaining but concluded, "This should not happen." Admiral Fallon agreed and undertook to look into the issue.

18. (C) During ADM Fallon's meeting with Alovov, the SBS Chief said the SBS, Ministry of Defense's air defense system, and state civil aviation radars all had registered the multiple incursions. He passed a map that indicated three separate incursions - one on August 10, 2007, and two on September 11, 2007, the anniversary of formation of the SBS. He said they had specific flight track details, but none were provided. He said the incursions went between two and 20 kilometers into Turkmen airspace. Admiral Fallon encouraged Alovov to provide the details through Embassy Ashgabat's Defense Attache so that this could be cleared up with ISAF and prevented in the future.

19. (SBU) COMMENT: The Defense Attache Office previously had sent a diplomatic note on the CHOD Conference, but received a negative reply from the Cabinet of Ministers. We are encouraged that Berdimuhamedov said he would support the invitation. This would be Defense Minister General Mammetgeldiyev's first trip to the United States. END

COMMENT.

¶10. (U) CENTCOM has cleared this cable.
HOAGLAND